



**UNICEF**  
**Engagement in**  
**Social Accountability:**  
**A stocktake**

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# 1. Background

## 1.1 Why a stocktake?

People-led, bottom-up and demand-driven social accountability initiatives can make an important contribution towards enhancing accountability for international child rights commitments. UNICEF therefore increasingly supports various social accountability initiatives for children's rights across regions, focusing on different governance levels from national to local as well as on a range of governance processes, from policy formulation and planning through tracking of expenditure to monitoring the quality of public services. UNICEF does not yet have a comprehensive overview of existing UNICEF country office programming in this area, however, nor has it developed an overarching approach to social accountability.

## 1.2 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this stocktake is to map UNICEF engagement in social accountability initiatives.

Specific objectives of this stocktake include to:

- provide an overview of best practice in social accountability, as identified in the existing literature
- map existing UNICEF social accountability initiatives and current UNICEF approaches to social accountability
- identify challenges, opportunities and lessons learned in this area
- provide recommendations to UNICEF to further strengthen its approach.

The stocktake will thus provide a basis for the development of evidence-based and in-depth programming guidance on social accountability.

## 1.3 Scope of the stocktake

This stocktake focuses on the accountability of public institutions, which may include in some instances non-state providers that deliver services on behalf of government agencies. It defines social accountability as more than just participation

in decision-making to shape policy, plans, budgets and so on; it also involves initiatives that empower communities to hold duty bearers to account.

## 1.4 Methodology and limitations

A variety of qualitative approaches were used to conduct this stocktake. Data collection methods included: a review of external literature and internal documentation; an assessment of UNICEF social accountability initiatives identified through the Results Assessment Module (RAM); a questionnaire on social accountability engagement, which collected 19 unique responses from 18 UNICEF country offices (see *Annex 1*);<sup>1</sup> and the development of specific country office case studies of UNICEF engagement in social accountability (UNICEF Burkina Faso, UNICEF Zambia and a UNICEF New York case study on the multi-country Data Must Speak initiative).<sup>2</sup>

Data presented in this stocktake should be interpreted with some caution. While efforts were made to comprehensively capture all instances of UNICEF engagement in social accountability, it is likely that some UNICEF initiatives were missed. In addition, most of the evidence regarding the UNICEF approach to social accountability presented in this stocktake is based on a short questionnaire and three case studies. Follow-up conversations with country offices might have provided additional insights, but the tight time frame for the research precluded such discussions. Finally, it came to light that there are different understandings within the organization of what constitutes 'social accountability'. This is a finding in itself, but it may also have influenced/skewed some of the findings in this stocktake. Despite these limitations, the data presented are considered sufficiently reliable to shed light on current country-level UNICEF social accountability initiatives and related challenges and opportunities.

1 The 18 UNICEF country offices that responded to the questionnaire were: Cambodia, China, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea, India, Kenya, Kosovo, Malawi, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Peru, Senegal, Tajikistan, Viet Nam, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Ghana Country Office submitted responses for two separate social accountability projects. Note: All references to Kosovo in this report should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

2 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Social Accountability – UNICEF Country Office Case Studies', forthcoming in 2018.



# 2. Key concepts and rationale

## 2.1 What is accountability?

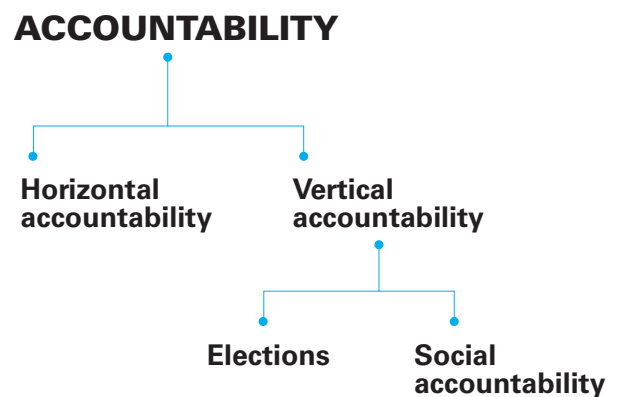
Accountability is a key human rights principle and a defining feature of the relationships between public officials, governments, communities, media and civil society organizations.<sup>3</sup> It has been defined as “a pro-active process by which public officials inform about and justify their plans of action, their behavior and results and are sanctioned accordingly.”<sup>4</sup> Essential to effective accountability is the existence of sanctions and remedies for improper or inappropriate actions and behaviour.

The accountability relationship encompasses four key elements:<sup>5</sup>

1. Setting *standards* of performance and indicators to measure them.
2. Obtaining *information* about action taken to meet those standards.
3. Making *judgements* about the appropriateness of those actions.
4. Imposing *sanctions* for unsatisfactory performance.

Accountability mechanisms exist to safeguard against the abuse of government authority and power, serving to hold governments accountable.<sup>6</sup> Accountability thus includes the ability of government agencies (horizontal accountability) and citizens (vertical accountability) to hold to account those institutions responsible for taxing and spending, and answerable for process, outputs and outcomes (see *Figure 1*).<sup>7</sup>

Figure 1. Social accountability components



3 The term ‘communities’ encompasses individuals who are non-citizens. While the term ‘citizen’ is used throughout the present report, UNICEF recommends putting an equal emphasis on non-citizens in the context of its work on social accountability. Non-citizens have, on the basis of international human rights law and the principle of non-discrimination, fundamental rights and freedoms, and civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. There are different groups of non-citizens, including permanent residents, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, victims of trafficking, foreign students, temporary visitors, and other kinds of non-immigrants and stateless people.

4 Ackerman, John M., ‘Social Accountability in the Public Sector: A Conceptual Discussion’, *Social Development Papers: Participation and Civic Engagement*, no. 82, World Bank, Washington, D. C., 2005.

5 Joshi, Anuradha, ‘Annex 1: Service Delivery – Review of impact and effectiveness of transparency and accountability initiatives’, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, 2010.

6 McNeil, Mary, and Carmen Malena, eds., *Demanding Good Governance: Lessons from Social Accountability Initiatives in Africa*, World Bank, Washington, D. C., 2010.

7 World Bank, *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People*, World Bank, Washington, D. C., 2003.

Figure 2. Social accountability components



## 2.2 What is social accountability?

Social accountability is a type of vertical accountability that refers to the role of civil society (citizens acting individually and collectively) to create and participate in organizational and institutional arrangements such that they can understand and control their government(s) – that is, hold government accountable (see *Figure 2*).<sup>8</sup>

Mechanisms of social accountability can be initiated and supported by the state, communities or both, but are very often demand-driven and operate from the bottom upwards.<sup>9</sup> Referring to social accountability solely as a ‘demand-side’ intervention can be misleading, however, as social accountability requires cooperation with the ‘supply side’ at various

levels of government.<sup>10</sup> In addition, social accountability extends beyond mechanisms that solely aim to strengthen participation.

Social accountability is interlinked with legal and judicial, quasi-judicial, political and administrative accountability. Social accountability has, for example, been found to have more impact when recourse for performance failures is tied to formal systems of judicial or administrative accountability.<sup>11</sup>

8 Tembo, Fletcher, *Rethinking social accountability in Africa: Lessons from the Mwananchi Programme*, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2013; McGee, Rosemary, and John Gaventa, ‘Synthesis report: Review of impact and effectiveness of transparency and accountability initiatives’, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, 2010.

9 Malena, Carmen, Reiner Forster and Janmejay Singh, ‘Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice’, *Social Development Papers: Participation and Civic Engagement*, no. 76, World Bank, Washington, D. C., December 2004.

10 Ringold, Dena, et al., *Citizens and Service Delivery: Assessing the Use of Social Accountability Approaches in Human Development*, World Bank, Washington, D. C., 2012.

11 Gibbons, Elizabeth D., ‘Accountability for Children’s Rights, With special attention to social accountability and its potential to achieve results and equity for children’, *Child Rights & Social Accountability Working Paper*, United Nations Children’s Fund, March 2015.



## 2.3 Why social accountability?

Social accountability can contribute to the promotion of human rights – such as those provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women – and is consistent with the human rights-based approach to programming (see *Box 1*). Social accountability is reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 16, including Target 16.6: “Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels”; and Target 16.7: “Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.”<sup>12</sup>

Evidence suggests that social accountability can contribute to child rights via increased state or institutional responsiveness brought about by: reducing corruption; building spaces for adolescent, youth and/or community engagement; empowering local voices; improving the use of budgets; and improving the delivery of services.<sup>13</sup> In fragile and conflict-affected settings, social accountability and grievance mechanisms play an important role in strengthening state legitimacy and thereby contribute to peacebuilding.<sup>14</sup>

Notable challenges remain, however, both in determining the most effective mechanisms for sustained impact and in adapting initiatives to different contexts. A recent review, for instance, cautioned against drawing general conclusions from the existing evidence base: In some cases, social accountability initiatives are very new, and accompanying impact studies are ongoing or just beginning; many studies focus on only one initiative in one locality; much of the literature focuses on how effectively initiatives have been implemented, rather than on their outcomes; and positive evidence in one setting is often not corroborated – and is sometimes even contradicted – by findings in another setting.<sup>15</sup>

### Box 1.

#### Social accountability and the human rights-based approach to programming

- The human rights-based approach (HRBA) is a framework that seeks to analyse inequalities and support redress mechanisms that address discriminatory practices. It is anchored in the key human rights principles of participation, transparency and accountability.
- The HRBA serves to strengthen the capacities of rights-holders to make their claims, and of duty bearers to meet their obligations, including in regard to accountability for service provision.
- The HRBA adds value to standard/conventional policy discourse by identifying the potential pitfalls of using technical approaches without addressing rights and accountability for these rights. It also helps to increase the incentives for the improved performance of duty bearers by creating alliances for social change.
- Poor service delivery undermines the right to education, to health and to water, sanitation and hygiene. If these human rights are unfulfilled, the life outcomes of children and youth from poor communities will be impaired. Social accountability provides one way to support these core HRBA goals.

12 Resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1, 21 October 2015.

13 McGee and Gaventa, ‘Synthesis report’.

14 Denney, Lisa, Richard Mallett and Dyan Mazurana, ‘Thematic Paper on Peacebuilding and Service Delivery’, United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, February 2015.

15 McGee and Gaventa, ‘Synthesis report’.



# 3. Some lessons from the literature

This section summarizes key aspects of successful social accountability initiatives, as identified by the literature review. These include the importance of: understanding context; localized and iterative approaches; strong local facilitators; supply–demand synergies; integrated action and multi-pronged approaches; inclusion; sustainability; and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

## 3.1 Understanding context

Context is critical in shaping, making and enabling social accountability interventions. This ties in with a broader recognition within the international development community that ‘context matters’ and that adapting to context is essential for effective programming and outcomes.<sup>16</sup> In terms of social accountability, several formal and informal contextual factors should be understood prior to the design and implementation of initiatives. These include, for example, country context, main actors, formal and informal political dynamics, state–society relations and intra-society relations (see *Box 2*).

At the same time, it is important to be aware of sector specificities when designing social accountability initiatives, particularly when the initiative aims to address multiple sectors. For example, it is often easier to hold decision makers and service providers accountable for visible and tangible aspects of a sector’s responsibilities such as infrastructure (e.g., number of schools, health facilities, water points) than it is for quality aspects (e.g., water quality, quality of education).<sup>19</sup> In highly specialized sectors such as health it may be particularly difficult for communities to judge the appropriateness of the services provided. Social accountability may not be as successful in less visible sectors such as nutrition and sanitation, particularly if community awareness is lacking

### Box 2.

#### Methodologies for a contextual analysis

O’Meally identifies six contextual domains that must be understood to develop effective social accountability initiatives: government and civil society capacity and willingness; political settlement; inter-elite relations; state–society relations (e.g., social contract); intra-society relations (e.g., exclusion); and global dimensions (e.g., the role and influence of development partners, relationships with other countries).<sup>17</sup>

Tembo proposes an adapted political economy analysis that focuses on:

- (1) Understanding underlying foundational factors, including the history of the formation of the state; the basis of the economy; the roots of the social, political, cultural and economic structures; and the country geography and its geo-strategic position in relation to other countries;
- (2) Identifying formal and informal institutions that shape the incentives for and capacity of key actors and the relationships between them, and how processes of political bargaining play out;
- (3) Identifying the game changers or main influencers in a given context;
- (4) Understanding engagement dynamics such as the behaviour (formal and informal) of various actors in relation to specific governance issues (including policy issues); and
- (5) Establishing institutional patterns and decision logics.<sup>18</sup>

16 O’Meally, Simon, C., ‘Mapping Context for Social Accountability: A Resource Paper’, Social Development Department, World Bank, Washington, D. C., 2013.

17 Ibid.

18 Tembo, *Rethinking social accountability in Africa*.

19 Mcloughlin, Claire, and Richard Batley, ‘The effects of sector characteristics on accountability relationships in service delivery’, Working Paper 350, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2012.

and there is low demand for services.<sup>20</sup> In situations where there is a monopoly on the provision of a particular service (e.g., water supply), social accountability alone may have little effect.<sup>21</sup> Finally, social accountability is more complex in sectors in which a number of stakeholders provide services, as the lines of accountability are less clear.

Given this complexity and the multiple public and private actors often involved in delivering services, it is crucial to map and understand the formal and informal accountability relationships – that is, who is responsible for what. This is particularly the case in countries that have undergone decentralization reform, where service delivery responsibilities are shared.

### Learning from the field: Burkina Faso<sup>22</sup>

Work on social accountability cannot be separated from ongoing processes around decentralization. This includes ensuring opportunities for social accountability and citizen control in the decentralization framework; addressing spatial differences regarding the capacity of local government staff; and strengthening the capacity of commune officials to manage budgets and complex procedures for the award of public contracts.

## 3.2 Localized and iterative approaches

To ensure the success of social accountability initiatives, it is critical to invest resources in nurturing the conditions to develop localized strategies, including by building on existing formal and informal accountability mechanisms and linking to domestic pressures for change.<sup>23</sup> Social accountability initiatives tend to have more traction in places where the problems and issues they focus on are perceived as highly important and significant by the actors involved.<sup>24</sup>

Consideration of context should also encompass distinct situations in country, for example, urban versus rural areas (see *Box 3*), relatively stable political regions versus regions with higher levels of conflict (see *Box 4*), varying levels of local capacity, and specific political economy factors.

### Learning from the field: Burkina Faso<sup>25</sup>

The design and planning of social accountability initiatives should take into account existing accountability mechanisms, including the status of ongoing and planned social accountability activities supported by donors as well as formal and informal social accountability channels and mechanisms.

Any social accountability initiative should be designed in close collaboration with citizens and consider citizens' perspectives to ensure that it focuses on those services considered most important for the well-being of their community. This builds on the experience that local priorities sometimes differ from what external agencies might perceive or expect. Interventions are more likely to be effective and sustained when they correspond to citizens' priorities and the realities of local communities.

## 3.3 Working with strong local facilitators or interlocutors

Collaboration with strong local facilitators or interlocutors has been identified as an important component of successful social accountability initiatives.<sup>26</sup> Some crucial characteristics of effective facilitators include the ability to: create platforms for dialogue among the key stakeholders, support agenda-setting processes, provide expert knowledge to citizens and state actors, enter into negotiation processes, increase credibility through partnerships, and strengthen the processes around sanctions.<sup>27</sup>

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Social Accountability – UNICEF Country Office Case Studies'

23 O'Meally, 'Mapping Context for Social Accountability'.

24 Ibid.

25 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Social Accountability – UNICEF Country Office Case Studies'

26 Tembo, in *Rethinking social accountability in Africa*, defines interlocutors as organizations or individuals with those "game-changing" characteristics necessary for addressing, or contributing to addressing, a specific collective-action problem.

27 Ibid.

**Box 3.****Social accountability in urban areas**

Social accountability initiatives are innovative pathways that can lead to improved delivery of urban services, better use of budgets, greater state responsiveness, new spaces for citizen engagement and empowerment of local voices.<sup>28</sup> Civil society organizations in cities and urban areas are drawing on an array of mechanisms and approaches to pursue social accountability initiatives. Well known experiences include participatory budgeting in Brazil and the use of citizen report cards in India, but new mechanisms in development take advantage of the spread of mobile telephones and increased access to the Internet.<sup>29</sup>

For social accountability initiatives in cities and urban areas to have an impact, it is important to:

- develop a deep understanding of local political and economic conditions to identify which tools are feasible and desirable to use
- link with civil society groups of the urban poor and support/build on existing social accountability initiatives
- work with urban poor groups that are part of trans-local movements, as they have higher and more robust levels of activity than groups that work exclusively in one locality<sup>30</sup>
- give equal opportunity to children from different backgrounds and neighbourhoods, particularly poor and disadvantaged areas
- leverage convening power to bring together politicians, policymakers, urban poor groups and civil society leaders to develop solutions tailored to the local context.

**Box 4.****Social accountability in fragile and conflict-affected contexts**

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, complaint and grievance mechanisms have been found to be especially important in strengthening state–society relations and accountability.<sup>31</sup>

For social accountability initiatives in fragile and conflict-affected contexts to be successful, it is crucial to:

- have a deep understanding of the local context and conflict dynamics, and manage the risk of exacerbating conflict (in line with the ‘do no harm’ principle)
- strengthen local trust and build on local knowledge and existing accountability mechanisms
- rely on strong local facilitators and other intermediaries with contextual knowledge and practical experience who are able to work with local communities and develop local capacity to help sustain the initiatives.<sup>32</sup>

28 McGee, Rosie, and John Gaventa, ‘Shifting Power? Assessing the Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives’, IDS Working Paper, vol. 2011, no. 383, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, November 2011.

29 Prieto-Martin, Pedro, et al., ‘Doing Digital Development Differently: lessons in adaptive management from technology for governance initiatives in Kenya’, Making All Voices Count Research Report, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, 2017.

30 Houtzager, Peter P., et al., ‘Social Accountability in Big Cities: Strategies and Institutions in Delhi and São Paulo’, IDS Working Paper, vol. 2016, no. 471, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, July 2016.

31 Denney, Lisa, Richard Mallett and Dyan Mazurana, ‘Thematic Paper on Peacebuilding and Service Delivery’, United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, February 2015.

32 Labrecque, Guillaume, and Isatou Batonon, ‘Accountability in Local Service Delivery: The Tuungane Community Scorecard Approach’, Policy and Practice Briefing Paper, International Rescue Committee, New York, May 2015.

**Learning from the field: Zambia<sup>33</sup>**

The Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) invests significant time in efforts to better understand government responsibilities for services and to foster a productive rapport with communities. This respectful relationship puts communities in the driver's seat as principals as opposed to non-governmental organization (NGO) agents. Sometimes this calls for adjustment in how communities perceive NGOs, as communities have typically looked to NGOs for resources and not for support for accountability processes. CSPR wants to illustrate the practical, long-term benefits to service delivery quality for communities that engage in such processes, and often points to the successes enjoyed by those communities involved. CSPR also encourages community participation by sourcing facilitators from within the actual communities themselves. This reliance on local capacity and ownership helps to ensure contextually driven processes that respond to the interests of service users.

**3.4 Supply–demand synergies**

Evidence suggests that social accountability initiatives that strengthen collective action in which communities *and* local decision makers and/or service providers jointly tackle problems are more successful than confrontational approaches to social accountability.<sup>34</sup> Social accountability initiatives should seek to strengthen the interface between state and society actors in taking collective action. It is also important to ensure a greater synergy between citizen voices/social accountability and open government/proactive disclosure initiatives. One of the most promising approaches involves “targeted transparency,” which entails the mandated, proactive disclosure of information that is perceived as relevant and actionable by potential users.<sup>35</sup>

**3.5 Integrated action and multi-pronged approaches**

Successful social accountability initiatives build on linkages and networks between pro-accountability state and society actors. For example, accountability strategies that promote both the citizen's ‘voice’ and the state's institutional capacity to respond to it can bring about stronger results (vertical integration).<sup>36</sup> Broad horizontal linkages with, for instance, other civil society organizations including the media and traditional leaders may also be an important success factor (horizontal integration). In addition, the various aspects of accountability – information, answerability and sanctions – must typically be addressed together to drive change.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, locally isolated social accountability initiatives with a solely demand-side focus are unlikely to be sustainable or able to address the more deeply rooted aspects of power relations to deliver results.

Increasing the strategic impact of social accountability initiatives requires a deep understanding of the multi-level nature of governance and service delivery problems, the power structures in place and the opportunities for coordination.<sup>38</sup> For instance, in the delivery of primary education, central government may be responsible for curriculum development and textbook production; regional government for the construction of school buildings; and local government for teacher recruitment, school supplies and the maintenance of school buildings. Service delivery bottlenecks may take place at any of these levels and merely engaging at the local level will have little impact on classroom shortages.

33 United Nations Children's Fund, ‘Social Accountability – UNICEF Country Office Case Studies’

34 Barr, Abigail, et al., ‘Information and collective action in the community monitoring of schools: Field and lab experimental evidence from Uganda’, Draft paper, January 2012.

35 Fung, Archon, Mary Graham and David Weil, *Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promise of Transparency*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007.

36 Fox, Jonathan, ‘Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?’, Global Partnership for Social Accountability Working Paper No. 1, World Bank, Washington, D. C., September 2014.

37 O'Meally, ‘Mapping Context for Social Accountability’.

38 See Fox, Jonathan, Joy Acheron and Aránzazu Guillán, ‘Doing accountability differently. A proposal for the vertical integration of civil society monitoring and advocacy’, U4 Issue 2016: 4, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen, August 2016; Fox, Jonathan, ‘Scaling accountability through vertically integrated civil society policy monitoring and advocacy’, Working Paper, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, December 2016.

**Learning from the field: Zambia<sup>39</sup>**

In Zambia, the Civil Society for Poverty Reduction has depended upon the combination of two projects, which instil rigorous policy and budget analysis on the one hand and local monitoring with communities on the other. These strategies have been enriched by insider/outsider coalitions between civil society and parliamentarians, and strong relationships with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of National Development Planning, which have supplied top-down authority to complement the bottom-up community activity. Ultimately, this mix of monitoring and advocacy has led to important improvements in service delivery as well as to policies and budgets that better represent the interests of the poor.

Annex 2 provides an in-depth discussion of select tools, and reveals how important it is to adapt social accountability initiatives to context, analyse and identify the potential trade-offs between tools, and take into consideration issues of sustainability and scale.<sup>44</sup>

**3.7 Inclusion**

To ensure that social accountability initiatives do not replicate existing power relations and instead meet their pro-poor promise, their design should expressly focus on inequality and exclusion rather than treat such issues in an ad hoc manner or devote limited attention to them.<sup>45</sup> Specific methodologies should be developed to ensure the inclusion of minority ethnic groups, the very poor, women, people with disabilities, and adolescents and youth, and also that M&E systems focus on inclusion.

**3.6 Social accountability methodologies**

A variety of social accountability methodologies and tools exist. These include more traditional methodologies such as Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys, citizen report cards, community scorecards and participatory budgeting as well as emerging developments in information and communications technology (ICT). Already, many programmes have focused on using tools and platforms that are based on mobile phone and digital technologies.<sup>40</sup> But while a tool such as the social messaging platform U-Report has proved very successful in reaching young people, and giving them the opportunity to express their views, it can also present challenges. These include difficulties in reaching the most disadvantaged – for example, in Uganda, U-Report may have favoured male and more educated individuals.<sup>41</sup> In addition, there is no evidence that civic technology initiatives such as U-Report can on their own help citizens to hold their governments or leaders to account.<sup>42</sup>

**Learning from the field: Burkina Faso<sup>46</sup>**

In Burkina Faso, several challenges were identified regarding the effective integration of women and excluded groups into the initiative and particularly into its leadership. Such challenges were notably political and cultural in nature. For example, cultural attitudes concerning appropriate roles for women in society hindered their participation. A key lesson learned from Burkina Faso is that initiatives should have a gender-responsive design and enable the inclusion of vulnerable groups, and pursue a specific strategy to engage women and vulnerable groups through outreach and other activities.

Those leading social accountability initiatives must consider the strengths and limitations of the various tools available, but there are also other important conditions to consider when selecting the best fit. Different studies emphasize the importance of adapting social accountability initiatives to context, recognizing the trade-offs between tools, and addressing the problems of sustainability and scale rather than simply choosing the preferred tool.<sup>43</sup> When planning and designing social accountability initiatives, and considering toolkit options, what matters is determining the approach most likely to produce sustainable results in a given context.

**3.8 Sustainability**

Sustaining social accountability initiatives is often challenging. There are different ways in which sustainability can be conceptualized, however. For a social accountability initiative to be sustainable it does not necessarily have to be implemented at scale. Taking a localized approach can sustain the initiative in select localities only. In addition, rather than sustaining the methodology itself, the initiative can also seek to sustain gains in transparency and community empowerment.

39 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Social Accountability – UNICEF Country Office Case Studies'

40 See, for example, the projects supported by Making all Voices Count, which supported the development of such innovative approaches from June 2013 to November 2017. Making All Voices Count, <[www.makingall-voicescount.org](http://www.makingall-voicescount.org)>, accessed 22 April 2018.

41 Peixoto, Tiago, and Micah L. Sifry, *Civic Tech in the Global South: Assessing Technology for the Public Good*, World Bank, Washington, D. C., 2017.

42 Ibid.

43 Fox, 'Scaling accountability'; Tembo, *Rethinking social accountability in Africa*; O'Meally, 'Mapping Context for Social Accountability'.

44 Ibid.

45 O'Meally, 'Mapping Context for Social Accountability'.

46 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Social Accountability – UNICEF Country Office Case Studies'

Some of the main elements of sustainable social accountability interventions are:<sup>47</sup>

- strong political will (at the national and local levels)
- identification of sustainability strategies at the outset of the project
- good entry points for broader post-project institutionalization
- engaged partners and consensus building
- systematic technical assistance to state and society
- professional knowledge of social accountability
- simple systems and procedures
- management incentives linked to performance
- long-term funding arrangements (ideally from government).

### Learning from the field: Burkina Faso<sup>48</sup>

The sustainability of social accountability projects depends on whether they can be institutionalized. The potential for sustainable benefits depends on the extent to which social accountability processes and citizen control are systematized and gradually integrated into the fabric of the relationships between citizens and commune governments via civil society organizations.

To ensure long-term and wider impact, it may be better to design broader projects that can weave accountability into the fabric of communities and which are able to address citizens' needs and priorities in various contexts and as they change over time.

## 3.9 Monitoring and evaluation

Better M&E approaches are needed for social accountability initiatives. Overall, the literature shows that the evidence on the impact of aid on community voice, empowerment and accountability initiatives is fragmentary and that substantive evidence on the impact of social accountability interventions is generally limited and/or inconsistent.<sup>49</sup> Much of the evidence that does exist is clustered around more measurable effects on service delivery, particularly in the health and education sectors.<sup>50</sup> How social accountability can alter the relationship between citizens and state agencies or potentially sustain improvements in civic engagement requires further evaluation over the long term, and this question should be considered throughout the entire programming cycle from situation analysis to evaluation. Impact evaluations are needed to address larger issues such as the scale and sustainability of social accountability initiatives.<sup>51</sup>

In addition, M&E design could ensure that greater attention is given to various aspects of social inclusion, so that women, people with disabilities and other excluded groups are considered in the design, organization, implementation and outcomes of different initiatives. The diversity of contexts, services and relationships that social accountability initiatives address calls for the piloting of new assessment approaches that draw on tools used to understand non-linear change and complexity in other fields, and which combine approaches and methods developed in other areas such as poverty reduction, governance and service delivery.<sup>52</sup>

47 Grandvoinet, Helene, Ghazia Aslam and Shomikho Raha, *Opening the Black Box: The Contextual Drivers of Social Accountability*, New Frontiers of Social Policy series, World Bank, Washington, D. C., 2015; Fox, 'Social Accountability'; Tembo, *Rethinking social accountability in Africa*.

48 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Social Accountability – UNICEF Country Office Case Studies'

49 McGee and Gaventa, 'Synthesis report'.

50 Grandvoinet, Aslam and Raha, *Opening the Black Box*.

51 Fox, 'Social Accountability'; McGee and Gaventa, 'Synthesis report'.

52 McGee and Gaventa, 'Synthesis report'.







# 4. Stocktake findings

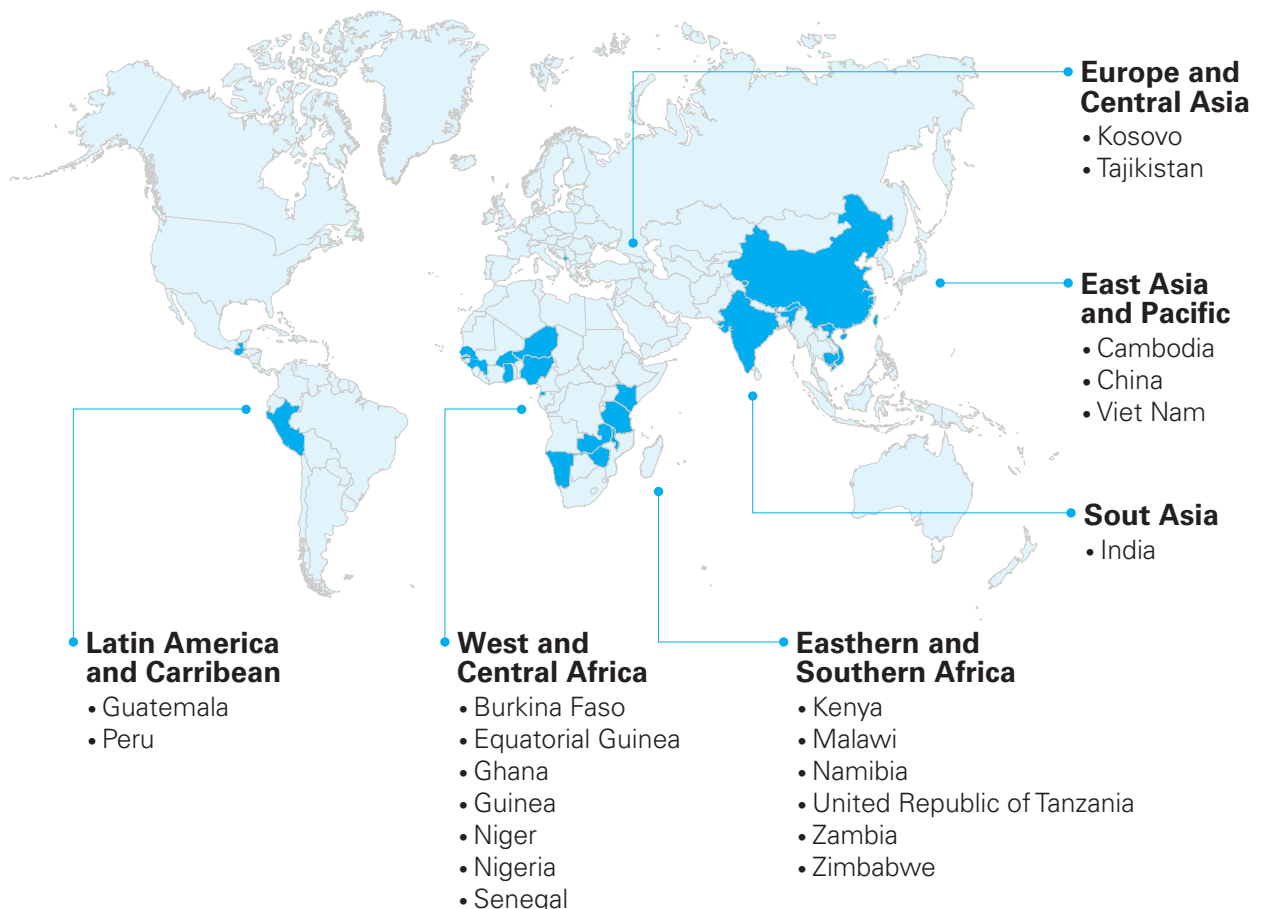
## 4.1 Where does UNICEF engage in social accountability?

The stocktake finds that UNICEF social accountability work takes place in a variety of contexts. In total, 21 UNICEF country offices report to engage in social accountability initiatives in RAM (see *Figure 3*). UNICEF primarily engages in social accountability in low- and lower-middle-income countries, with slightly more frequent engagement in the Eastern and Southern Africa, and West and Central Africa regions. Notably, UNICEF does not currently engage at all in social accountability in the Middle East and North Africa region.

## 4.2 Length of UNICEF support for social accountability initiatives

Despite the longstanding engagement in social accountability by some UNICEF country offices, this work is relatively new for most teams. All of the reported projects (n=19) began between 2005 and 2017, with the majority commencing since 2014 and some projects still in the early phases of planning and implementation.

**Figure 3. UNICEF country office engagement in social accountability**



### 4.3 Scale of supported social accountability initiatives

The projects take place on a wide variety of scales. A few projects such as those in China and Ghana were reported to be operational on a 'nationwide' scale, but what this means in practice varies. For instance, in China, UNICEF supports the national government in the development of a national framework for social accountability. In Ghana, UNICEF reports that it supports social accountability through its work on the District League Table.<sup>53</sup> This tool provides a multi-sectoral, integrated assessment of how Ghana is developing across all 216 of its districts. The District League Table has become a key tool in national dialogue, providing direction and information on Ghana's overall level of development and highlighting areas of the country that continue to lag behind. Similarly, in Nigeria, UNICEF engages in budget monitoring in all 36 states in the federation. Other country offices (e.g., UNICEF Guinea, UNICEF Namibia, UNICEF Zambia) focus on a small number of localities, using interface meetings or other tool-based social accountability mechanisms (see *Table 1*).

### 4.4 Approach to social accountability

Most UNICEF country offices identify as engaging in a community-based/demand-side approach to social accountability, involving elements of vertical integration. Of the projects that responded to this survey question (n=19, multiple answers possible), 12 respondents indicated that they strengthen accountability by empowering communities to hold decision makers and/or service providers to account; 10 respondents reported actively engaging with public actors at different levels of government to strengthen accountability (vertical integration); and 5 respondents reported using coalition building between stakeholders as a way to strengthen accountability (horizontal integration). Only one respondent reported a project that engaged at the community level and supported both vertical and horizontal integration. Five respondents reported focusing solely on community-level engagement.

**Table 1. Geographical scale of UNICEF social accountability initiatives**

Project	Geographical scale
Cambodia	90 rural districts (out of 159 rural districts)
China	Nationwide
Equatorial Guinea	17 districts (out of 32 districts)
Ghana (Education)	15 districts (out of 216 districts)
Ghana (District League Table)	All 216 districts (nationwide)
Guinea	2 rural municipalities (out of 341 municipalities)
India	5 districts across 2 states (out of 36 states and union territories)
Kenya	2 counties (out of 47 counties)
Kosovo	Nationwide
Malawi	5 districts (out of 29 districts)
Namibia	148 schools in 2 regions
Niger	35 municipalities (out of 255 municipalities)
Nigeria	Nationwide
Peru	13 regions (out of 26 regions)
Senegal	14 rural communities (out of 370 rural communities)
Tajikistan	3 districts (out of 58 districts)
Viet Nam	3 provinces (out of 58 provinces) and 1 city
Zambia	10 districts (out of 106 districts)
Zimbabwe	110 wards across 4 districts (out of 1,200 wards nationwide)

53 United Nations Children's Fund, *Ghana's District League Table 2017*, UNICEF, November 2017.

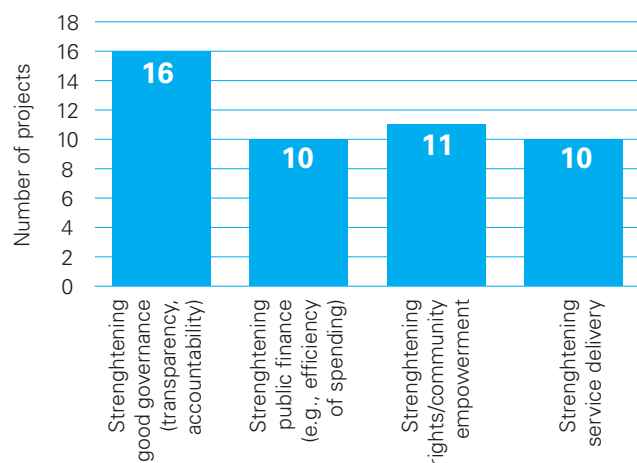
## 4.5 Context in which social accountability initiatives are implemented

UNICEF social accountability initiatives are mostly implemented in rural contexts, according to the survey findings (n=19, multiple answers possible). The vast majority of the projects (16 projects) are implemented in rural areas, but more than half of them (10 projects) also target urban areas. The initiatives frequently focus on particularly poor areas (nine projects) and areas largely inhabited by ethnic minorities/indigenous populations (six projects). Social accountability programming is notably absent in fragile and conflict-affected areas. Only UNICEF Niger reported implementing its social accountability initiative in an area considered fragile/affected by conflict.

## 4.6 Objectives of UNICEF engagement in social accountability

Many country offices identify strengthening good governance as the central objective for UNICEF engagement in social accountability, with 16 respondents reporting this as a key priority (n=19, multiple answers possible). Other stated project objectives were community empowerment (11 projects), strengthening public finance (10 projects) and improved service delivery (10 projects) (see *Figure 4*).

**Figure 4. Objectives of UNICEF social accountability initiatives (multiple answers possible)**

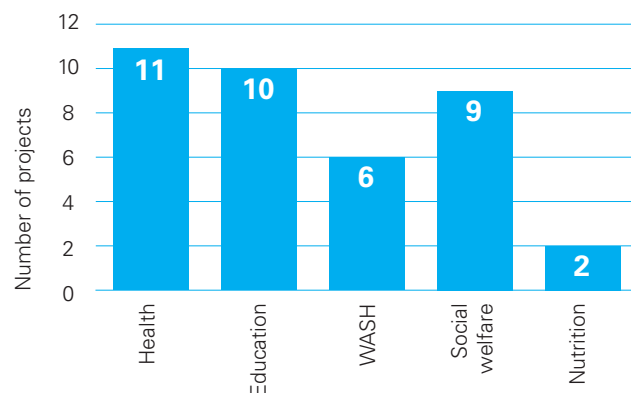


## 4.7 Focus of UNICEF social accountability initiatives

UNICEF social accountability initiatives frequently involve multiple sectors (n=19, multiple answers possible). Almost half of the projects (nine projects) identified in the survey address accountability in two or more sectors and a third of respondents (six projects) reported focusing on four or more sectors. Another third of respondents report focusing on a single sector only. The sectors most often in focus are

health (11 projects) and education (10 projects), followed by social welfare (9 projects) and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) (6 projects). Nutrition, referred to only twice, is mentioned least frequently (see *Figure 5*).

**Figure 5. Sector focus of UNICEF social accountability initiatives (multiple answers possible)**



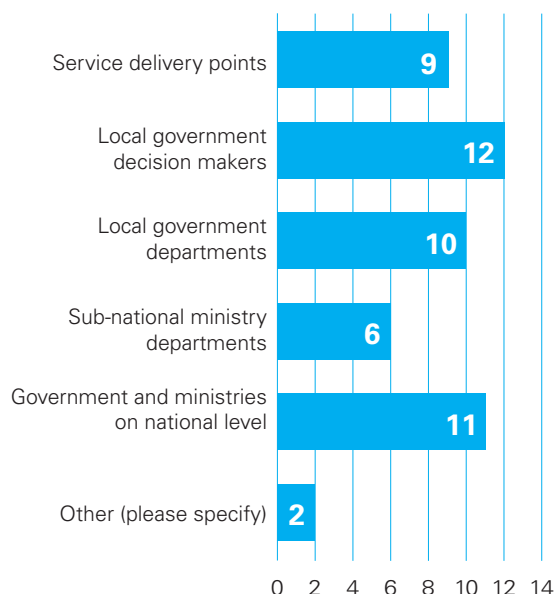
### Learning from the field: Burkina Faso<sup>54</sup>

In Burkina Faso, citizens identified priority needs that differed from those around which the social accountability project had been conceived and designed – both in regard to the choice of sector and to specific aspects of public service delivery. For example, while improving the delivery of school supplies was recognized as important for the quality of education, parents pointed out that recruitment and retention of teachers was often difficult and, as such, more critical to address as an overriding priority. In other instances, communities considered aspects of public services such as public security, management and maintenance of public infrastructure, and hygiene and sanitation to be more of a priority than those relating to school supplies. Therefore, social accountability initiatives should not necessarily focus on sectors or be designed on a sectoral basis.

UNICEF social accountability initiatives hold multiple duty bearers to account, with an emphasis on local government (n=19, multiple answers possible). Over three quarters of respondents (15 projects) report focusing on holding local government stakeholders to account (whether elected leaders such as mayors and councillors or local government departments). Holding national government stakeholders and ministries to account is the aim of 11 projects, although usually in combination with a focus on sub-national public actors. Only a single project was reported as focusing solely on holding national government to account (see *Figure 6*).

54 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Social Accountability – UNICEF Country Office Case Studies'

**Figure 6. Actors held to account by UNICEF social accountability initiatives (multiple answers possible)**



The majority of projects focus on supporting communities, informal community groups and/or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to hold public actors to account (n=19). In over half of them (11 projects), community members are supported, either as individuals or through informal/voluntary community groups. Eight projects support formalized civil society groups such as community-based organizations (CBOs), NGOs and the media. In seven projects, civil society support is complemented by support for other government actors, hinting at vertical integration. Four respondents, however, reported a sole project focus on supporting government to hold local public actors to account. Technically, this is an example of horizontal accountability rather than social accountability.

#### 4.8 Design

Given the potential complexity of social accountability initiatives, particular those that focus on multiple sectors and actors, accountability mapping is important to ensure an effective design. Twelve respondents reported having conducted an accountability mapping as part of the project design phase (n=19). Projects that engaged in accountability mapping most frequently did so through informal stakeholder discussions (13 projects), rather than through formal stakeholder analyses (6 projects) or a formal review of policies and legislation (3 projects).

To design the projects, UNICEF frequently collaborated with a range of stakeholders, with a focus on national and local public actors (n=19, multiple answers possible). For most of them (12 projects), UNICEF had engaged with local government. Country offices had often also worked with sub-national departments (nine projects), sector ministries (nine projects) and the ministry of finance or planning (eight

projects). Also frequently involved in project design were NGOs and CBOs (eight projects) and international organizations (six projects). Fewer respondents reported the involvement of marginalized groups (five projects), adolescents (four projects) and youth (four projects).

UNICEF country offices reported incorporating contextual considerations into the design of the projects (n=19, multiple answers possible). Nine respondents reported accounting for variation across urban and rural localities, and the same number accounted for the social exclusion of specific groups and/or disparities. Only three respondents reported not taking into account any contextual considerations during the project design phase.

Most respondents reported having taken active steps to ensure inclusion (n=19, multiple answers possible). Strategies were integrated into the design of the projects to include adolescents and children (11 projects), women (8 projects), people with disabilities (8 projects), and ethnic or religious minorities and indigenous populations (6 projects).

#### 4.9 Social accountability methodologies

UNICEF uses a variety of social accountability methodologies (n=19, multiple answers possible). Frequently reported methodologies include: interface meetings between communities and service provider (13 projects), budget monitoring (8 projects), community-based participatory monitoring (7 projects) and scorecard methodologies (5 projects). Two projects, run by UNICEF Kenya and UNICEF Zimbabwe, were reported to apply ICT developments such as U-Report and RapidPro. UNICEF Namibia reported a mobile application in development.

#### 4.10 Implementation

UNICEF primarily implements the projects in collaboration with partners (n=19). UNICEF implements 12 projects together with CBOs, NGOs or government stakeholders. Four projects are implemented solely by UNICEF partner(s) such as CBOs or NGOs. In three instances, the project is implemented directly by UNICEF.

While multiple UNICEF sections support many of the social accountability initiatives, the Social Policy section predominately leads this work (n=19). Social Policy leads 14 projects. The Education section was identified as the lead in two projects, while the Health, Communication for Development (C4D) and Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) sections lead one project each. In almost all cases (17 projects), the lead section collaborates with other sections. The most frequently reported partner sections included Education (eight projects), Health (seven projects), field offices (seven projects), Child Protection (six projects) and C4D (six projects).

### 4.11 Monitoring and evaluation

M&E is a critical step in the social accountability process. The survey asked UNICEF country offices to identify the indicators used to measure outputs and results (n=18). The individual project responses demonstrate different approaches to improving accountability and service delivery using a variety of indicators. Many of the country offices did not provide clear and measurable indicators. A review of those indicators that were reported revealed that 10 projects use output/outcome-level indicators to monitor the impact of initiatives (see Box 5). Eight projects focus solely on process indicators (e.g., number of meetings held) and just one project was reported as having explicit indicators for measuring the inclusion of marginalized/vulnerable groups.

#### Box 5.

#### Select indicators used by UNICEF social accountability initiatives

- Percentage of citizens who report increased satisfaction with a basket of services delivered by sub-national authorities and local service providers.
- Number of public investment projects for children that have been approved and funded.
- Number of legal norms approved as a result of advocacy efforts.
- At least one issue raised by stakeholders tabled at the national level for a policy decision.
- Findings of social accountability tools discussed at a regional forum at least once a year.

Of the 18 projects that responded to the question, 6 reported that the project had been evaluated. Many projects were in the early stages of planning and implementation and so had not reached the evaluation stage.

### 4.12 Results achieved by UNICEF social accountability projects

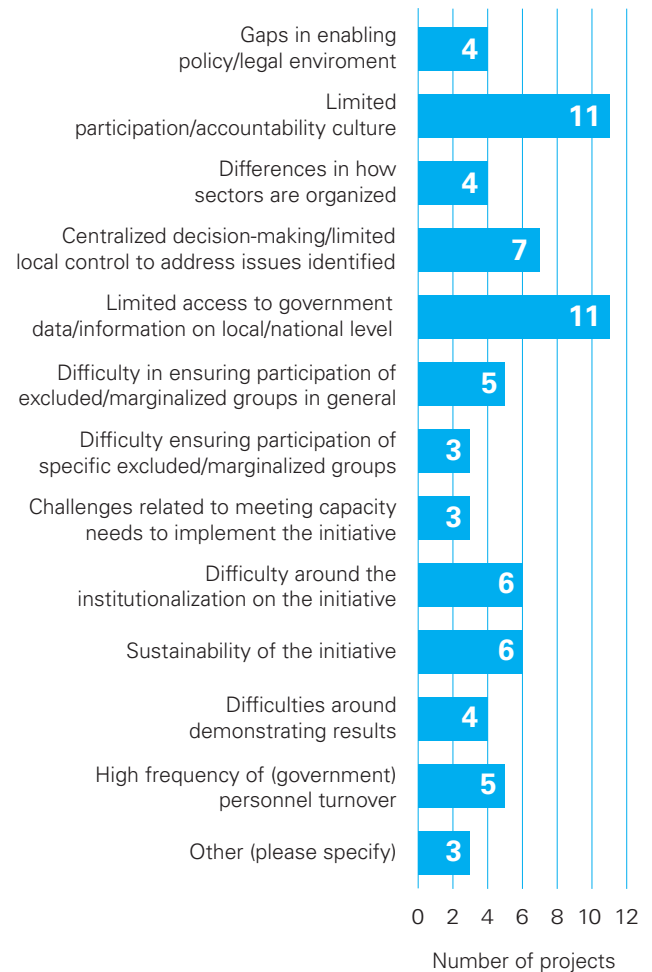
The initial findings suggest that UNICEF social accountability engagement has great potential to yield concrete results for children. While only selected UNICEF projects reported results, those that did offered great promise (see Box 6).

### 4.13 Challenges

UNICEF country offices were asked to identify challenges and lessons learned from their experiences of supporting social accountability (n=18, maximum of five answers). Lack of participation or an accountability culture, and limited

access to government data and information were the most common challenges identified. Next came limited local capacity for decision-making and control, and difficulties in institutionalizing and sustaining the initiative. Challenges around the inclusion of excluded/marginalized groups were also frequently mentioned. Less common challenges include gaps in the enabling policy/legal environment, differences in how sectors are organized, and difficulties around demonstrating results (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Main challenges identified in supporting social accountability (n=18, maximum of five answers)



**Box 6.****Results achieved in selected social accountability initiatives****UNICEF Burkina Faso (multi-sector: education, health and WASH)**

In Burkina Faso, the social accountability initiative was implemented in two phases: the first, which ran from May 2013 until September 2014, concerned only the education sector and covered 49 communes; the second, which operated throughout June 2015, was extended to include the health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sectors and to cover an additional 21 communes, bringing its total coverage to 70 communes. The project focuses on participatory budgeting at the commune level through multi-stakeholder committees composed of local civil society organizations, commune authorities and decentralized service providers. A 2016 evaluation of the initial phase found that the initiative: generated positive results in terms of the strengthening of local authority capacities and citizen participation; showed promising results in terms of expected effects on the quality of public financial management and supplies, materials and infrastructure for the primary education sector; and was crucial for better performance in the education sector with regard to education monitoring indicators. The evaluation noted that the project is “a powerful driver of positive change that can contribute to the realization of the development goals.”<sup>55</sup>

**UNICEF Zambia (multi-sector: health, education, WASH, social welfare, infrastructure, agriculture)**

In Zambia, the social accountability initiative is implemented in 20 rural communities in 10 districts. The project uses a scorecard/interface meeting methodology, which is complemented by national-level advocacy around the data generated. At the local level, the initiative has resulted in improved services, especially for vulnerable groups. For example, more than 1,300 youth have newly enrolled in secondary education in two communities after the government built and opened two new schools in response to young people’s demands that it address the problem of long distances between their communities and existing schools. In one of the poorest communities included in the programme area, community members successfully advocated for two additional teachers to work in the local primary schools, in response to scorecards that revealed non-compliant pupil–teacher ratios. Similarly, the scorecard process helped to reveal and promote public discussion about staff shortages at two rural health centres.

**UNICEF Namibia (education sector only)**

The project in Namibia is implemented in 148 schools across 2 regions. The initiative seeks to strengthen the functions of school boards in terms of improving the management of schools and the implementation of quality education. It also aims to build the capacity of schoolchildren to participate in governance issues at the school level and to ensure that they are active participants in school boards. The project focuses on civic education, community-based monitoring and interface meetings. Among other findings, an evaluation revealed the following results: SAT results for English as a second language showed significant improvement among Grade 5 learners in 2015 (average score: 54 per cent) compared to the 2014 cohort of learners (average score: 44 per cent). In mathematics, learners scored 63 per cent on average in 2015, which represents a considerable improvement (up 16 percentage points) on the average score achieved by the 2014 cohort.

55 Ian C. Davies Conseil Inc. and Société d’Etudes et de Recherche en Santé Publique, *Projet de redevabilité sociale et de contrôle citoyen: Mis en œuvre dans 49 communes – Evaluation Rapport Final*, UNICEF Burkina Faso, 2016.



## 4.14 Lessons learned

Projects reported various lessons learned, several of which stand out:

- Respondents frequently mentioned the importance of government buy-in as a criterion for success and that this includes partnerships with government at both the national and local level. Respondents also emphasized the importance of trust and building positive relationships with government stakeholders, and of avoiding giving the impression that the initiative is ‘just another audit’.

### Learning from the field: Zambia<sup>56</sup>

The social accountability process tends to flow much more smoothly when a certain degree of trust exists between civil society, local communities, service providers, sector departments and local government. Trust takes a long time to build, which can frustrate development partners and other stakeholders, and obstacles such as limited data sharing cannot always be overcome.

- In terms of key stakeholders, respondents emphasized both the role of grass-roots organizations in building accountability mechanisms from the ground up and that the media serves a crucial function. Deepening relationships with the media was, however, identified by UNICEF country offices as a potential area for attention.
- Respondents mentioned the continued need to engage citizens and entrench the practice of social accountability. In terms of inclusion, respondents recognized the need to ensure that the poor and most marginalized are included in the process.
- Quite a few respondents commented on sustainability aspects of social accountability. Several participants mentioned the potential to institutionalize and scale up the projects from the outset. It was also recognized that ‘institutionalization’ may take a long time.
- In terms of results, respondents emphasized the importance of continued measurement, monitoring and tracking. It was also recognized, however, that results produced by social accountability initiatives are not necessarily easy to measure and may take a long time to produce.



# 5. Discussion, recommendations and conclusion

## 5.1 Opportunities

Although the overall number of social accountability initiatives across UNICEF is still modest, data from the questionnaire indicate increasing interest in this area and an upward trend in the number of such initiatives. The more established projects that UNICEF supports, particularly those that have been evaluated, are an important source for internal learning.

Accountability is a key human rights principle and it drives much of the organization's work. As such, social accountability initiatives complement UNICEF programming on strengthening service delivery, adolescent engagement and strengthening other accountability mechanisms (e.g., independent human rights institutions). They also support UNICEF work on social policy, particularly in the Public Finance for Children, Decentralization and Local Governance, and Social Protection programme areas.

UNICEF social accountability initiatives also demonstrate strong opportunities for internal and external cross-sectoral collaboration and/or integration. Finally, select projects have demonstrated the potential for social accountability to achieve results for children.

## 5.2 Areas for further improvement

Through this stocktake, it became evident that there is an uneven understanding within UNICEF of what constitutes social accountability and its various elements, and particularly the type of engagement that it entails between civil society and government actors. For example, some projects identified strengthening accountability between government actors as an approach to social accountability, while other projects categorized community participation as a type of social accountability.

The stocktake also suggests that UNICEF could take a more strategic approach towards social accountability. In particular, there has been uneven implementation of the various steps and elements that can make these initiatives successful.

While the approach to social accountability that UNICEF supports is frequently cognizant of the importance of supply-demand synergies, the focus of country offices has thus far been mainly on community-based/demand-driven and localized interventions. In contrast, strategic interventions include multi-pronged strategies and linkages with actors at different administrative levels (i.e., local, regional and national), support different elements of social accountability (e.g., transparency measures in tandem with community empowerment) and strengthen horizontal linkages between local actors (e.g., between local government, decentralized agencies, traditional leadership and the media).<sup>57</sup>

Another key challenge identified in this stocktake is how to effectively include marginalized groups in social accountability initiatives. While the majority of respondents reported taking specific steps towards ensuring inclusion, a significant number of projects have experienced challenges around ensuring the participation of excluded/marginalized groups. This suggests that inclusion should be more thoroughly reflected in the design and implementation of initiatives. While it appears that the role of innovation and technology in this area is increasingly being explored, the implications for inclusion – who has access and who does not – should be considered.

Another area that UNICEF can explore is social accountability programming in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Examples of UNICEF social accountability engagement in such areas are currently limited. This can be explained by the inherent challenges for accountability mechanisms in contexts of heightened physical insecurity and weak administrative capacity, which are further complicated by a lack of community trust.<sup>58</sup> The lack of examples also points to the tension between short-term needs in fragile and conflict-affected areas and the long-term investment required for accountability and trust to take root. In addition, in conflict-affected states, poor or weak governance is often an underlying root cause of the conflict.<sup>59</sup> Further investigation into the lack of social accountability practices in fragile and conflict-affected areas specifically may reveal additional insights.

57 Fox, 'Social Accountability'.

58 Gibbons, 'Accountability for Children's Rights', With special attention to social accountability and its potential to achieve results and equity for children', Child Rights & Social Accountability Working Paper, United Nations Children's Fund, March 2015.

59 United Nations Development Programme, *Reflections on Social Accountability*, UNDP, 2013.

Finally, for many projects, M&E appears to be weak and process-oriented, and lacks a focus on measuring results, particularly for the most disadvantaged.

### 5.3 Recommendations

- Enhance internal UNICEF capacity/knowledge on social accountability, including by developing appropriate guidance, documenting best practice and setting up a practice group (e.g., on Yammer).
- Establish a model for social accountability that can be piloted/tested in select UNICEF country offices. The model could provide specific guidance on context analysis and focus on the empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized communities (including adolescents and youth) to support the strengthening of key services.
- Explore how using ICT-enabled platforms such as U-Report and RapidPro to capture citizens' voices can support the effectiveness and reach of social accountability mechanisms, while ensuring that the use of such technologies does not negatively affect inclusion.
- Explore social accountability programming in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
- Invest in strong M&E that focuses on results for children, including the most marginalized, and document experiences for upstream policy advocacy and local, national and global learning.

### 5.4 Conclusion

Social accountability can make an important contribution to the full realization of child rights. Well-designed accountability mechanisms can help to increase state or institutional responsiveness to communities by reducing corruption, building new spaces for citizen engagement, empowering local voices, and improving the use of budgets and the delivery of services.

The complexity of effective social accountability should not be underestimated, however. Social accountability initiatives should be firmly placed within, and take account of, local social, cultural and political realities. Success crucially depends upon initiatives being fit for context, taking a multi-pronged and integrated approach, working with strong local facilitators, ensuring inclusion, and applying strong M&E to measure impact and to support learning by doing.

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## Annex 1: Questionnaire

### Social Accountability Questionnaire

People-led, bottom-up and demand-driven accountability initiatives can make an important contribution towards achieving child rights. UNICEF supports various social accountability initiatives for children's rights across regions, focusing on different governance levels from national to local as well as on a range of governance processes, from policy formulation and planning through tracking of expenditure to monitoring the quality of public services.

UNICEF does not yet have a comprehensive overview of existing country office programming in this area, however, nor has it developed an overarching approach to/strategic framework for social accountability. To address this issue, the Human Rights Unit (Programmes) in collaboration with the Public Finance and Local Governance Unit (Social Inclusion Section, Programmes) embarked on a project to take stock of current UNICEF engagement in social accountability. This will form the basis for the development of a strategic framework for social accountability.

This questionnaire will help us to complete this stocktake analysis of current UNICEF engagement on social accountability.

The questions are divided into four parts: (1) Key information about the project (partners, context and coverage); (2) Project design and implementation; (3) Monitoring and evaluation; and (4) Challenges, opportunities and lessons learned.

We estimate that the exercise will not take more than 15–20 minutes of your time. If you have any questions regarding the questionnaire, please contact Marija Adrianna de Wijn at [mdewijn@unicef.org](mailto:mdewijn@unicef.org).

**Q1:** In which country office do you work?

### PART 1: Key information about the project (partners, context and coverage)

**Q2:** When did the project commence? *(Please format as MM/YYYY)*

**Q3:** What are the project objectives? *(Please tick a maximum of three)*

- Strengthening good governance (i.e., transparency, accountability)
- Strengthening public finance (e.g., efficiency of spending)
- Strengthening rights/community empowerment
- Strengthening service delivery
- Other (please specify)

**Q4:** Which section within UNICEF leads the project?

- Social Policy
- Health
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)
- Education
- Child Protection

- Communication for Development (C4D)
- Field office
- Other (please specify)

**Q5:** Which other sections within UNICEF are *actively* involved in the project? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Social Policy
- Health
- WASH
- Education
- Child Protection
- C4D
- Field office
- Other (please specify)

**Q6:** How is the project implemented?

- By UNICEF
- By a UNICEF-supported partner (e.g., a community-based organization [CBO] or non-governmental organization [NGO])
- Jointly by UNICEF and a UNICEF-supported partner
- Other (please specify)

**Q7:** Which government sector(s) is/are the focus of the project? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Health
- Education
- WASH
- Social welfare
- Other (please specify)

**Q8:** Which public actor(s) is/are held to account through the project? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Service delivery points (e.g., schools, health clinics)
- Local government decision makers (e.g., mayors, councillors)
- Local government departments (e.g., sector departments under the control of local government)
- Sub-national ministry departments (e.g., district health department under the control of the Ministry of Health)
- Government and ministries at the national level
- Other (please specify)

**Q9:** Within the project, who is primarily supported to hold the above actor(s) to account? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Individuals within the community
- Informal/voluntary community groups/committees (e.g., parents' association, WASH committee)
- CBOs
- NGOs
- Media
- Government
- International organizations
- Other (please specify)

**Q10:** Which governance level(s) does the project primarily focus on? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Community
- District
- Regional/provincial/state

- National
- International
- Other (please specify)

**Q11:** Which of the below statements apply to this project? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- The project seeks to strengthen accountability by building coalitions between different stakeholders (e.g., between communities, NGOs and the media)
- The project seeks to strengthen accountability by empowering selected communities to hold local decision makers and/or service providers to account
- The project seeks to strengthen accountability through complementary engagement with different public actors at multiple governance levels (vertical integration)
- Other (please specify)

**Q12:** Please describe the geographic and demographic context of the project. *(Please tick all that apply)*

- The project is implemented in rural areas
- The project is implemented in urban areas
- The project is implemented in areas largely populated by indigenous groups and/or ethnic/religious minorities
- The project is implemented in particularly poor areas
- The project is implemented in fragile or conflict-affected areas
- Not applicable

**Q13:** Please tell us if the project includes explicit activities/strategies to ensure the inclusion of: *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Adolescents/youth
- People with disabilities
- Women
- Ethnic/religious minorities and/or indigenous groups
- Not applicable
- Other (please specify)

**Q14:** What is the coverage of the project? (For example, implemented in 40 villages in 3 out of 16 districts, or in 80 out of 160 municipalities, or nationwide.)

## PART 2: Project design and implementation

**Q15:** How did the idea for the project come about? The initiative: *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Is based on the UNICEF situation analysis
- Is based on a Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES) analysis
- Resulted from new/existing legislation
- Resulted from a Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS)/Public Expenditure Review (PER)
- Was suggested by a development partner (e.g., World Bank, United Nations Development Programme)
- Was suggested by a local civil society actor (e.g., NGO, CBO)
- Was suggested by a government counterpart
- Other (please specify)

**Q16:** Which social accountability methodology is used? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- PETS
- Civic education
- Scorecards/citizen report cards
- Interface meetings with service providers (meetings where communities and service providers discuss issues together)
- Complaint boxes/grievance mechanisms
- Budget monitoring
- Community-based participatory monitoring
- Public audits
- ICT-enabled platforms such as RapidPro or U-Report
- Other (please specify)

**Q17:** Which stakeholders contributed to the design and implementation of the project? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Community (including marginalized groups, e.g., people with disabilities)
- Adolescents
- Youth
- Local government
- Local government associations or other professional associations
- Service providers/points (e.g., schools, health clinics)
- Sub-national ministry departments (e.g., district or provincial department of education)
- CBOs/NGOs
- Sector ministries
- Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning
- International organizations (e.g., United Nations entities, bilaterals, World Bank)
- International accountability organizations (e.g., international budget partnership)
- None
- Do not know
- Not applicable
- Other (please specify)

**Q18:** Did the project design include a mapping analysis of different roles and the division of accountabilities of public actors? (For example, while a school may be held accountable for school building maintenance, the allocation of teaching materials or the recruitment of teachers may be the responsibility of the provincial education department.)

- Yes
- No
- Do not know
- Other (please specify)

**Q19:** How were these different roles and the division of accountabilities of public actors taken into account? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Through formal stakeholder analysis
- Through informal discussions
- Do not know
- Other (please specify)



**Q20:** Were any specific contextual considerations taken into account in the design of the initiative? (*Please tick all that apply*)

- Urban vs rural dynamics
- Conflict dynamics
- Social exclusion of specific groups
- No
- Do not know
- Other (please specify)

### PART 3: Monitoring and evaluation

**Q21:** Please list the project outputs/results:

**Q22:** Please list the indicators used to measure outputs:

**Q23:** Was the project evaluated?

- Yes
- No

**Q24:** Please list specific results that have been achieved:

**Q25:** Are there plans to scale up the project?

- Yes
- No
- Project is already scaled up
- Do not know

### PART 4: Challenges, opportunities and lessons learned

**Q26:** Within the context of the project, were any of the below challenges experienced? (*Please tick a maximum of five*)

- Gaps in enabling policy/legal environment
- Limited participation/accountability culture
- Differences in how sectors are organized (if the project covers multiple sectors)
- Centralized decision-making/limited local control to address issues identified through the social accountability initiative (e.g., in terms of staffing or budget decisions)
- Limited cooperation by and/or animosity from public service providers/government stakeholders
- Limited access to government data/information at the local/national level (e.g., plans, budgets)
- Difficulties in ensuring the participation of excluded/marginalized groups *in general*
- Difficulties in ensuring the participation of *specific* excluded/marginalized groups
- Difficulties around the scale-up of the initiative
- Challenges related to meeting capacity needs to implement the initiative
- Difficulties in identifying/mobilizing sufficient facilitators
- Difficulties around the institutionalization of the initiative
- Sustainability of the initiative
- Difficulties around demonstrating results
- Gaps in internal UNICEF capacity to effectively support the initiative

- High frequency of personnel turnover in public service provider/government stakeholders
- None
- Do not know
- Other (please specify)

**Q27:** Please briefly describe key broader lessons learned: (What was particularly useful, or what should have been done differently? What are the key recommendations to other UNICEF country offices thinking about implementing a social accountability initiative?)

## Annex 2: Social accountability tools and methodologies

This annex looks at some of the common tools used in global social accountability initiatives. These include more traditional methodologies such as Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS), citizen report cards, community scorecards and participatory budgeting as well as emerging developments in information and communications technology (ICT). Those leading social accountability initiatives must consider the strengths and limitations of the various options available, but there are also other important conditions to consider when selecting social accountability tools.

Several synthesis studies of social accountability emphasize the importance of adapting social accountability initiatives to context, recognizing the trade-offs between tools, and addressing the problems of sustainability and scale rather than simply choosing the preferred tool.<sup>60</sup> When planning and designing social accountability initiatives, and considering toolkit options, what matters is determining the approach most likely to produce sustainable results in a given context.

### Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys

PETS are generally described as quantitative surveys that track the flow of funds to identify what happens to different streams of government resources and what proportion of the resources reaches the intended groups of beneficiaries. PETS are useful in identifying leakages and bottlenecks along the funding chain between duty bearers and citizens. They can help to track the path of financial resources from central government or ministries to local schools, health centres, and water and sanitation services.

The benefits of PETS is that they can open up the 'black box' of internal financial flows, to allow citizens to track funds, identify gaps or problems in allocations, and to discover specific problems of leakages and misuse. PETS can also help to detect problems such as absenteeism or failures in budget implementation, with the aim of ensuring that resources reach front-line service providers. PETS are useful for identifying implementation deficit issues in public finan-

60 Fox, Jonathan, 'Scaling accountability through vertically integrated civil society policy monitoring and advocacy', Working Paper, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, December 2016; Tembo, Fletcher, *Rethinking social accountability in Africa: Lessons from the Mwananchi Programme*, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2013; O'Meally, Simon, C., 'Mapping Context for Social Accountability: A Resource Paper', Social Development Department, World Bank, Washington, D. C., 2013.

cial management and may contribute to greater transparency and effectiveness in the service delivery system by revealing bottlenecks or leakage points.

There are some challenges in using PETS that are both contextual in nature (i.e., relations with government) and related to capacity. The survey cannot be carried out in situations where the government is unwilling to provide data or cooperate in the acquisition of data. PETS are also more complex than, for example, scorecards or citizen report cards, and thus their use calls for the involvement of organizations or supporting partners that can contribute to core capacities for research design, sampling, data collection, and analysis.

There are also only a few examples where PETS have been conducted and managed by local or indigenous civil society organizations. Engaging external partners such as research groups or larger non-governmental organizations that have the capacity to implement the survey is likely to be necessary. In addition, an effective partnership with local and networked civil society organizations is required to disseminate the results of the survey. Even when the PETS is well designed and managed, the final information it produces may be weakened by data limitations, either because service provision is not well documented or because service providers try to misrepresent information.

### **Citizen report cards**

Citizen report cards are contextually designed surveys that seek to obtain direct feedback from citizens regarding the services they use. The process requires citizens to rate the performance of specific service providers. Well-designed and implemented citizen report card processes allow coalitions to gather information on citizens' perceptions of service delivery. They can even enable coalitions to document the performance of agencies that provide services that have either been decentralized or contracted out. Citizen report card initiatives can provide insight into the effectiveness of public spending across geographical areas and sectors, making them suitable for use as part of a multi-sectoral approach.

Citizen report cards can create benchmarks against which to promote performance improvements and to help assess whether programmes are reaching citizens to the expected level. They can support the improved accountability of the public sector by supplying systematic feedback from users to managers or elected officials as well as to front-line service providers. When implemented via citywide media and meetings, citizen report cards can create a platform for communities and civil society to engage in dialogue on ways to improve services.

Citizen report cards can be used to assess either a single public service or several services simultaneously. Feedback can be collected from a relatively large section of the population through careful sampling. Perceived improvements in service quality can be compared over time or across various public agencies involved in providing the service(s) in focus.

Citizen report cards also present challenges in implementation, as they require well-designed and effectively managed

dissemination strategies. Quality implementation and public visibility of the citizen report card are essential, so that public agencies take note of citizen feedback and pursue the actions required to correct weaknesses. Without both survey technical capacity and dissemination capacity, citizen report cards are difficult to design, implement and publicize. Technical validity is essential, as methodological errors can be used by resistant agencies to discredit the results of the survey. Costs can be high compared to those associated with many other social accountability tools, because of the technical skills and statistical experience required of staff.

### **Community scorecards**

Community scorecards combine participatory quantitative surveys and focus group discussions at the community level. The scorecards provide service delivery agencies with feedback on experiences, suggestions, and complaints from citizens about the quality of the services. This process brings together service recipients and service providers to jointly analyse and address service delivery challenges. This approach can be conducted for a single public service or for several services simultaneously. With support from civil society organizations, the community scorecards can be institutionalized to enable the monitoring of services and citizen experiences over time and to allow comparisons to be made across those agencies and sectors responsible for service delivery.

Community scorecards encourage local problem solving, help to track assets and spending, and generate performance benchmarks for service delivery. A key characteristic of the utility of community scorecards is that they tend to focus less on the need for rigorous quantitative data on user satisfaction rates than citizen report cards do. Scorecards lend themselves to more immediate consultation between service users and providers, which provides a basis for developing solutions to identified problems. In this way, they represent a less formal version of citizen report cards.

There are challenges associated with using scorecards since they rely on high quality, trained facilitators, who may be in short supply. Reaching out to stakeholders before embarking on the scorecard process is critical but not always feasible. In locations where local technical capacity is limited, community scorecards may be difficult to design and implement. Community scorecards cannot be easily applied to large geographical areas, which may hinder the scaling up of the methodology or prompt the use of citizen report cards in their place.

### **Participatory budgeting**

Participatory budgeting involves direct citizen participation in the different phases of budget formulation, decision-making and monitoring. It may include the preparation of alternative budgets with a view to influencing budget formulation and improving targeted public spending. Participatory budgeting may improve citizens' understanding of budgets and budget constraints, and thus encourage stronger dialogue between communities, elected representatives and service delivery staff.

A significant strength of participatory budgeting is that, where outreach activities are successful, it gives a wide range of citizens insight into the black box of government budgets. Because participation in the process exposes citizens to all aspects of their local government's budgeting cycle, this approach maximizes the ability of citizens to identify irregular actions on the part of local government authorities.

Citizen input into defining budget priorities is associated with effective poverty alleviation outcomes and more inclusionary public policies. Because participatory budgeting depends on close interaction between citizens and local government officials, it can be both an effective trust-building activity and support the development of an active interface between civil society and the state.

The Porto Alegre model is frequently cited and widely used, but there is a risk that it could be seen as a quick fix for complex management and governance problems.<sup>61</sup> Governments have encountered a number of challenges when implementing participatory budgeting, and these need to be managed carefully. When a government is not transparent about fiscal information or cannot provide a budget forecast, citizens may be unaware of fiscal constraints and may demand services and goods that the government is unable to deliver. In some cases, governments have been unable to execute the recommendations of the participatory budgeting process due to poor financial management, creating tensions that have undermined the sustainability of participatory budgeting as a whole.

It is often challenging to include in participatory budgeting processes all segments of society, from the most marginalized groups to the middle class, academia and the private sector. The middle class and private sector usually have better access to public services and thus do not see the same value in participatory budgeting activities. Marginalized groups, in contrast, often encounter high participation costs. Such disparities between different economic groups may affect the quality of participation and the equity of final budget priorities.

### Information and communications technology

ICT has a number of properties that may contribute to significant changes in the nature and dynamics of accountability interactions. ICT has the potential to help significantly reduce limitations of distance and time. Electronic interactions can enable engagement with more locations across larger areas, increasing the number of potential participants. ICT can elicit an immediate crowd effect, by making a message accessible to a large number of ICT users simultaneously. Tapping into the latest ICT developments to disseminate information is much less costly than traditional means of communication and the extra costs of adding further recipients are minimal. Such characteristics facilitate social mobilization by reducing the transaction costs for both participation in and coordination of certain social accountability initiatives (e.g., electronic petitioning).

Much remains to be understood about the impacts of ICT-enabled communications on accountability. Various ICT tools such as online mapping, crowdsourcing and social media (e.g., OpenStreetMap, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter) allow for the low-cost and high-speed dissemination of information and images in the public space. That said, numerous ICT for Development (often known as ICT4D) initiatives have not taken off, and well-intentioned but unused 'zombie platforms' abound.

ICT has the potential to significantly enhance social accountability initiatives in three main ways:

1. ICT can facilitate greater transparency of government and service provider processes through the timely provision of information to citizens and their representatives about resource allocation and service delivery, among other areas of interest.
2. ICT can empower citizens and civil society to engage in informed and meaningful dialogue with government about the quality of governance and service provision. ICT gives individuals and social intermediaries the means to generate and disseminate information and news independently, thus putting governments under pressure to respond. In a closed governance environment, ICT can empower citizens to break the government's monopoly on news generation.
3. ICT allows for effective action by citizens to demand improved governance, including greater accountability on the part of governments and service providers. Using ICT, larger numbers of citizens can organize and communicate rapidly to put pressure on governments to respond to governance or service provision issues. It is not clear, however, how well such mobilizations are sustained. There is a notable difference between citizens' initial uptake of messages of protest or exposures of abuse on the one hand and their use of the many well-intentioned ICT4D platforms and applications on the other.

<sup>61</sup> For more information on the Porto Alegre model, see: World Bank, 'Empowerment Case Studies: Participatory Budgeting in Brazil', World Bank Group, 2004. Available at <[https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/14657\\_Particip-Budg-Brazil-web.pdf](https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/14657_Particip-Budg-Brazil-web.pdf)>, accessed 21 April 2018.



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